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Political narratives / narrations of the political: an introduction

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Abstract: This introductory essay outlines a perspective on political narratives that moves beyond a narrow understanding and highlights the reception of political narratives in everyday contexts and conceptualizations of political spheres in everyday narratives of the political. It offers distinct perspectives of (1) narrative as practice and ontology, that is, the view that telling and receiving stories are universal modes of mediating (political) views; (2) narrative as strategy, that is, the intentional or automatic use of narrative to further relatively specific goals; and (3) narrative as method, that is, as an analytic approach to sociopolitical realities in academia. The essays in this issue show how political narratives are interpreted, modified, and coconstructed in everyday stories and as part of popular narratives, and how political processes and structures are framed in everyday narratives.

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Political Narratives / Narrations of the Political: An Introduction

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Political Narratives / Narrations of the Political

An Introduction

“Incorrect Narrative”: The Story of Pizzagate

In late 2016, the online disclosure platform WikiLeaks published the contents of the hacked personal email account of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign manager, John Podesta. In the emails, users stumbled across exchanges between Podesta and the owner of a Washington, DC, pizzeria—a donor to the Democratic Party—in which they converse about organizing events for the Clinton campaign. In the emails, the words “pizza” and “sauce” appeared—everyday expressions typical for this type of restaurant. But users in message boards began speculating that these words might be code used by a sex trafficking and pedophilia ring operating out of the basement of the pizzeria and involving Clinton and other officials of the Democratic Party. The story about Pizzagate soon spread to other online forums and was circulated widely on social media, not just by conspiracy theorists. Later, the Turkish press reported in a number of articles on the alleged scandal in the midst of US elections. However bizarre the story of Pizzagate, it gained traction and inspired users to develop its plot further, with links to FBI investigations, secret symbols, and evidence of a corrupt political party conspiring to harm the communal good.¹

As an extreme example, the story of the Pizzagate conspiracy provides insights into some crucial elements of political narratives. Such narratives assist in reducing complex political processes and political value systems to easily understandable stories. These are not necessarily simple—as the Pizzagate story, with its many subplots and secrecies, illustrates—but provide clear-cut divisions of the political system with morally bankrupt and corrupt political opponents responsible for all developments bad and wicked. They seek to explain intricate processes of lobbying, coalition building, and campaigning with criminal intent, nepotism, and sexual deviancy. This explanatory dimension creates order and orientation: those involved in Pizzagate, those dazzled by corrupt politicians, and those able to see through this mist of conspiracy and corruption. With this order, narratives like Pizzagate reinforce or validate worldviews and conceptions of the political system, for example, as a swamp that needs to be drained by political outsiders or as an overly big government that needs to be minimized for the good of the people. The “stickiness” of such narratives with “sufficient tenacity to survive and thrive” (Boyle 154) in the social media market of ideas and stories motivates those receiving and agreeing with their message: to share, amend with more details, and even organize and try to gain political advantages from their distribution. In its radical form, this motivation to act can take the shape of the shooter intruding into the alleged sex trafficking headquarter in the basement of the pizzeria with an assault rifle, seeking to directly fight the conspiracy.²

Apart from reception, sharing and distributing narratives helps in actively conveying political messages and worldviews to harm political opponents and support political movements and ideas. “Controlling the narrative” means political advantage and the ability to frame political processes according to one’s views. For many observers, Pizzagate was an attempt to manipulate the political opinion with the help of fake news websites and social bots, automatically distributing the story to reach a larger audience.³ However ephemeral the act of storytelling or the invention of a narrative might be, they can be “sticky,” gain traction and momentum. Strategically used, a narrative can control the news cycle and force politicians and campaigners to defend themselves against far-fetched accusations. Gadinger, Smith Ochoa, and Yildiz (in this issue) show how political events such as demonstrations and riots evoke reactions from politicians and protesters, framing conflict as either criminal conduct (“thuggery”) or legitimate political action (“resistance”). As such diverging interpretations resonate in the broader public debate, the more “sticky,” persuasive or powerful narrative of events influences public opinion and has the

capacity to suppress certain issues and interests. In their contribution, Gadinger, Smith Ochoa, and Yildiz shed light on contextual features contributing to the success or failure of narrative framings of events.

For Terry Eagleton, narrative is “the most potent of all ideological forms” (Eagleton 71) in that it presents closed stories with coherent logics. Much like ideologies as “world-historical plot[s],” it claims to offer stringent explanations, causal relations, and genealogies for sociocultural and political realities. Perrino (in this issue) shows how narratives and linguistic performance feature in constructing collective identities that exclude outsiders and enforce essentialist categories of nationality and race. Here and in other cases (e.g., Briggs and Mantini-Briggs), narrative stretches to biopolitical perceptions of order beyond the scope of situated performance. It has explanatory potential for complex processes, organizational principles, and diverging values. As Sanders (in this issue) shows, the explanatory potential has historic dimensions and concerns the politics of memory when contested narratives of the past come together in public performances. Political narratives are not limited to this explanatory dimension but have performative power to motivate and organize collective action (Mayer). Sutter (in this issue) makes use of the concept of collective action frame to show how volunteers during a refugee crisis used a dominant narrative to make sense of their engagement and represent it vis-à-vis public authorities. Controlling narratives and telling compelling stories features in the construction of political realities, with tangible outcomes in political debates and elections.

The importance of narrative and other forms of communication to the political is highlighted given the premise that “politics is largely language” (Shilton and Schäffner 4) and that various forms of communicative behavior and linguistic discourse make up a large parts of politics. This begs, if not a definition, an explication of what can be understood as the political in political narratives—what qualifies a narrative as political? Shenhav proposes to consider the context of emergence or production and the content as criteria:

We can thus define a political narrative as one that emerges from a formal political forum, such as a parliament, a cabinet, party meetings or political demonstrations, or as narrative produced by politicians and public officials in the course of their duties. Another possible approach is to note the contents of the narrative or the conclusions that may be drawn from it. If these contain themes that are considered “political,” such as power relations and collective decision-making or compromise,

the narrative might be defined as political, even if it was generated outside official political frameworks. (Shenhav 2006, 247)

By using such a broad approach, contestations of power “between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it” (Shilton and Schäffner 5) and modes of arguing and bargaining as well as processes of deliberation and cooperation (Habermas; for international relations, see Müller) fall into the scope of the political. Understanding the political as not limited to official political frameworks has two major advantages for the study of political narratives:

1. Not just political institutions and actors (as “elite micro fields of power,” Adam and Vonderau 17) or conventional governance processes but also more complex political constellations, policies, and discursive elements come into focus. This includes everyday “conflicts of interest, struggles for dominance and efforts at cooperation between individuals, between genders, and between social groups of various kinds” (Shilton and Schäffner 5).
2. Narrative in reference to political processes is not excluded but is understood as coconstitutive. Accordingly, not just the level of state institutions but also everyday practices, the reception of political narratives by the broader public and the individual or collective mediation of narratives are important.

The contributions in this special issue, while considering the influence and importance of political institutions and formal policy frameworks, shed light on such aspects and take qualitative approaches to political narratives. From different disciplinary backgrounds, the authors explore the intricacies of political narratives and show how narrative can be understood as a research perspective, as practice, as strategy, and as methodology.

Over the past couple of decades, the notion of political narrative has gained increasing attention in public debates and academia (see Shenhav 2005). In these debates, storytelling is portrayed as an innate quality of human existence, used to make sense of and construct conceptions of the political at the same time. Political pundits and academics draw from the concepts of *Homo narrans* (Koschorke; Lehmann; Niles) and narrative structure as universal (Fahrenwald 82f.; Gottschall) to point to the centrality of “stories” in politics, as well as to its power. Narratives

help one understand prefigured political processes and feature in the figuration of political practices, whether it's because they are innate cognitive patterns or because they are learned cultural modes of perception. The reception of narratives is argued to be able to reduce complexities, to deal with risk and contingencies, and to shape worldviews. Narratives, it is argued, are crucial and effective in mediating political stance, selling policy programs, or positioning forceful “metanarratives” (Lyotard) of liberalism, conservatism, or socialism. They feature in the construction of social realities and political systems and ideologies. Less the content or logics of political arguments, but catching stories and being “on message” (Silverstein) are understood to enable political success.

The “narrative turn” (Czarniawska; Kreiswirth) in the social sciences and the humanities is a turn away from positivist approaches to social realities (Goodson and Gill 18) and political processes. It does not take the social as a given, ready to be observed and analyzed, but works with the assumption that perceptions of the world are mediated. Such mediated perceptions—for example, in the form of narratives, and the ways they are mediated, the modalities of their transmission, their effects, and the relation between different and diverging narratives—are the object of study. For political narratives and narratives of the political, this poses questions of trust and plausibility added to questions of evidence and truth. The story of Pizzagate had to be retracted as an “incorrect narrative”⁴ by the website Infowars in early 2017—not because it had been proven to be untrue numerous times by well-established newspapers and other publications shortly after its release,⁵ but because the owner of the pizzeria threatened to sue if there was no apology and retraction. In the reception of the story, truth claims and substantial evidence against accusations are only one aspect. More important, the Pizzagate narrative is related to issues of mistrust in political processes and journalism and to closed worldviews and networks of power. The mediation of narratives is contingent on social status and political orientation. If narrators are not trusted because of their political stance or because they are perceived of as representative of opposing political beliefs, narratives are less likely to be believed—and vice versa.

Despite a proclaimed lack of micro perspectives (Shilton and Schäffner 5) on political narratives and narratives of the political, strands of research from folklore studies focus on the role of politics in everyday narratives (recent examples being Astapova; Bernal; Hercbergs; Noy), especially in relation to the concept of political narrative. The relations between narratives and political processes have been scrutinized regarding the use of narrative both in contemporary politics (Bohmer

and Shuman; Noyes) and from a historic perspective (e.g., Mills). In folklore studies, the political entanglements of folklore (and narratives) have been highlighted vis-à-vis their role in nation building processes (Dundes; Oinas; Wilson 1973, 1976), their legitimizing function for political processes (Wilson 1975), or their meaning for the formation of the discipline (Ó Giolláin). Specifically, the role of jokes and tales (Laineste; Oring; Shehata) and the relations between folklore and political representation (e.g., Moody-Turner) have been highlighted. Furthermore, disciplines such as political sciences, sociology, and linguistic anthropology have used the concept of political narrative as an analytic category (Gadinger, Jarzebski, and Yildiz), probed it with regard to its relevance to political theory (Hofmann, Renner, and Teich), or analyzed its role in constructing, for example, a “European narrative” to foster a European identity (Beck and Grande). More recently, studies have looked at how narratives are used by political actors (Bacon; Shenhav 2006), in relation to linguistic-anthropological concepts of political discourse (Lempert and Silverstein; Silverstein), or how narrations in media—movies, TV series, books—take politics as their theme (Gadinger et al. 2016).

Against the backdrop of studies from different disciplines that have analyzed the use of political narratives in politics and their conceptualization in theory, focusing on them in everyday contexts foregrounds a number of specific questions: how are political narratives, produced in policy processes, taken up, interpreted, modified, and reproduced in everyday stories and as part of popular narratives? How are political processes and structures framed in everyday narratives in the public sphere? This special issue of *Narrative Culture* takes these questions as a starting point to investigate the role of narratives for and in political processes. The contributions in this issue focus on both the reception of political narratives in everyday contexts and conceptualizations of political spheres in everyday narratives of the political. They probe the interpretation, modification, and reproduction of political narratives not by professional political actors and in policy arenas but in specific situations. The contributions in this issue analyze how political processes are made sense of in narratives, how concepts of the political spheres are constructed in narratives in specific situations and everyday contexts, and how narrative features in shaping political identities. They show how narratives are used to make sense of political engagement and shape relationships between volunteers and public authorities (Ove Sutter), how political narratives feature in the coconstruction of political, social and cultural identity (Sabina Perrino), how official narratives relate to local narratives as part memory politics (Rita Sanders), and how different stories

of political events circulate and relate to each other (Frank Gadinger, Christopher Smith Ochoa, and Taylan Yildiz).

For the analysis of political processes and practices, three distinct perspectives of narrative are pertinent: (1) narrative as practice and ontology, that is, the view that telling and receiving stories are universal modes of mediating (political) views; (2) narrative as strategy, that is, the intentional or automatic use of narrative to further relatively specific goals; and (3) narrative as method, that is, as an analytic approach to socio-political realities in academia. In the following, I outline these three dimensions and show what role they play for political narratives.

Narrative as Practice and Ontology

Narrative approaches conceptualize actors as “storytelling animals” (MacIntyre 216) or as *Homo narrans* (Koschorke 9–12). A perspective on narrative as practice and ontology conceptualizes storytelling as a universal cultural and social practice. This is—implicitly—a cognitive argument: if storytelling and the reception of stories are innate qualities, they predetermine social life and political organization in the sense that they are contingent on narrative forms. Accordingly, the constitution, stabilization, and transformation of individual and collective identities depends on narrating (Neumann 7). Sabina Perrino (in this issue) shows how storytellers and audiences coconstruct their national identities based on linguistic clues and political stance in the process of narrating. Following such a perspective, the political is—constituted by narrative as much as it constitutes political identities and processes. Similarly, narratives “provide a rich source of information about how people make sense of their lives, about how they construct disparate facts and weave them together cognitively to make sense of reality” (Patterson and Monroe 315). Following a social constructionist approach, Bruner argues that processes of social interaction are structured in narrative form—not only as a means to describe social reality, but also as a way to construct and make sense of it (Bruner 4f.). As Gadinger, Smith Ochoa, and Yildiz (in this issue) illustrate, such processes of coconstruction involve different levels: politicians, protesters, and public debates as well as security policies, experiences of marginalization, and mediatized examples of discrimination and conflict. As part of performative approaches, for example, in folkloristics and anthropology (Bauman; Bauman and Briggs; Bendix), creative and situational aspects of narrative have been highlighted. Rita Sanders (in this issue)

shows how private stories of suffering take form in public and official commemoration processions—not as strategic performances but as situated enactment. In this context, it has been stressed that although social and cultural repertoires of narrative certainly affect storytelling, the generation of narratives is influenced more by competence and performance than by prestructured patterns.

Narratives are a way to deal with complexities and contingencies. Under circumstances of uncertainty and risk—what sociologist Ulrich Beck calls the “risk society” (Beck)—narratives have the capability to reduce complexity by leaving out some aspects while highlighting others and creating causal chains of action.⁶ Narrative as practice and ontology denotes a mode of understanding and framing political practices as an everyday heuristic, applicable to political organization, political processes, and policies. From this perspective, political narratives and narrations of the political are not a specific mode for thinking about political processes but a crucial part of them. This is also illustrated by Ove Sutter (in this issue), who describes political narrative in terms of cognitive structure, fundamentally shaping how political processes and political engagement are perceived of.

Narrative as Strategy

Narratives are used as strategy in political processes, that is, intentionally or intuitively to further relatively specific goals. Their potential to mediate messages, to persuade, and to garner support makes narratives as the “mediation of political process in story form” (Hartley) suitable to harness strategically. Phrases like “controlling the narrative” hint at this persuasiveness: if stories are told in the right way and at the right time, stressing the appropriate aspects and addressing the appropriate audiences, they are effective and can be used to frame political positions as favorable. They are controlled vis-à-vis political opposition or chaos: if one does not control the narrative, others will to your disadvantage, or the narrative will spin out of control with potentially negative effects. In popular culture, movies such as *Wag the Dog* (1997), TV shows such as *House of Cards* (2013–), or the more comedic *The Thick of It* (2005–2012) poignantly portray what it means to get on top of a story and perform damage control. Narratives need to be framed by adding new elements, by confession, or by producing new narratives more potent than the original ones. This involves lobbying reporters, leaking information, or—in the hyperbolic case of *Wag the Dog*—staging a fake war to deflect attention from domestic scandals.

Such and other framing efforts are not necessarily intentional in the sense that the potential effect of telling a story is anticipated and the story is told as a conscious attempt to manipulate, steer, or call to action. In relation to a perspective on narrative as practice and ontology, the strategic use of narrative can be understood as a quasi-automatic or intuitive process in which narrative patterns are creatively performed, often improvised against the backdrop of socially and culturally available repertoires of narrative.⁷ Sutter and Perrino both show how actors make use of political narrative to represent their agendas to others. As a common communicative form, telling stories is in this sense not decoupled from other everyday communicative events, but one where narratives feature in the mediation of perspectives, be it on political processes or other fields. While telling jokes as subversive practice against authoritarian regimes (Oring) can be strategically harnessed for political organization and resistance, in many cases it is a way in which political positions in private spaces are signaled and in which socially shared meaning is created in a relatively nondirected way.

Narrative as strategy scales up from such personal spaces of private conversation to communal spaces—social media posts about Pizzagate as an alleged strategy to harm the Clinton campaign—to domestic politics and diplomacy. As reflexive strategy, narratives are “a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future for international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors” (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle 2). The well-researched case of the European Union illustrates how narratives of shared European history are referenced to create justification for the EU integration process (Larat) or to create the idea of a cosmopolitical Europe as the “only effective pragmatic utopia” (Beck and Grande). By positioning grand narratives of shared European culture, peace-building, and values (Groth 2016; Groth and Bendix), they are aimed to legitimize the European project or the foster a European identity among its citizens. As much as they are capable of motivating collective action (Mayer), actors at local levels can make use of such narratives to frame their claims and interests into the according cultural and developmental policies and apply for funds (see the Sutter’s contribution in this issue for how narratives are used to shape the relation of volunteer workers with public authorities). The appropriation of powerful narratives can thus be harnessed by those telling the story and by those inscribing themselves into the stories (Groth and Sutter).

Similarly, narrative forms are used in international negotiations to bolster arguments or frame positions as authentic or normatively just: more elaborated

stories, but also proverbs and sayings are used in such multilateral settings to frame positions as vernacular and “authentic,” that is, as grounded in complex value systems and less as informed by economic or strategic interests (Groth 2018a). Narrative scales in this regard, too: from grand narratives of political systems to stories of specific processes and narrative fragments in interaction situations. Because such fragments or narrative tokens have indexical qualities, narratives need not always to be spelled out in full: references to shared stories (about Pizzagate, European identity, or proverbial wisdoms) elicit political framings and point to policy positions without telling the whole story.

The correlation between strategy and narrative leads to an aspect of narrative that has been intensely discussed in the past few years, for example, in the context of “fake news” debates. It is the relation between narratives and truth claims or how narratives relate to claims of “true” or “false” in political processes. The phrase “political narrative” can be understood in contrast to that of “political reality” (Hartley 1) to differentiate the narrative mediation from observable processes. This does not necessarily mean that political narrative is inconsequential or without ramifications for political reality, but it presupposes that the thing being mediated differs from its mediated form and exists prior to it. The idea of such a “single truth” has been criticized in the wake of the narrative turn and social-constructivist understandings of social (and political) reality. The shift to mediation allows for the analysis of multiple interpretations of political processes and political spheres. As Frank Gadinger, Christopher Smith Ochoa, and Taylan Yildiz as well as Rita Sanders show in their contributions, there is always more than one narrative of a specific situation or process. Yet these processes and spheres can be understood as shared references rather than objective political reality. Much as the psychoanalytic distinction between narrative truth and historic truth (see Spence 1984), such an antipositivist approach to political narratives is interested in how narrative truth is fabricated, how the validity of narratives is constructed or deconstructed, and how different modes of reception influences the felicity conditions of political narratives. Going back to the example of Pizzagate, the interesting aspect is not how (and if) the story was grounded in true or verified facts but how its relation to efforts of debunking and verification was configured. As part of narrative strategies, the analysis of the construction of validity—in terms of both mediation and reception—is a crucial aspect of understanding the strategic use of political narrative.

Narrative as Method

This leads to the third perspective on political narratives and narrations of the political: narratives and stories can be harnessed to investigate political processes from an analytic perspective. From this perspective, narratives are a methodological tool in the social sciences (Patterson and Monroe) to study the construction, mediation, and negotiation of political processes. By analyzing narratives as “the everyday life beliefs that operate through a culture” (Tambling 3), the authors in this issue are able to scrutinize the construction of political identities, the interface between different political spheres, or the emergence of political positionalities as part of stories. In this regard, the study of narratives can be understood as a methodical approach to the political in its various dimensions because it can aid in explaining aspects of political processes. By pointing to divergent understandings and interpretations of political organization, structure, and practice, the study of narrative unveils how they are always mediated and part of complex sense-making processes. In contrast to positivist approaches, analyzing political narratives or narrations of the political seeks not to pinpoint exact sequential orders of political processes but to show how different actors reflexively position themselves, how they make use of stories to interpret and bolster their arguments, and how they integrate narrative as strategy. Against the backdrop of shared and verifiable factual reconstructions of political developments—the construction or mediation of political “truth”—such a methodical approach to narrative has the potential to capture conflicting and seemingly incommensurable versions of sociopolitical events.

Besides this explanatory potential, narratives allow access to fields that cannot be sufficiently studied with ethnographic methods, such as past practices without adequate sources or documents to reconstruct the emergence of political structures or policies. Even if documents of political processes—for example, multilateral negotiations, lobbying efforts, bilateral talks or deliberations on domestic policy—are published and accessible to research, they remain decontextualizations (or entextualizations; Park and Bucholtz) of communicative practices and leave out contextual features and events crucial for an understanding of strategies and motives (Groth 2018b). Valdimar Hafstein’s work on UNESCO’s intangible heritage convention illustrates that the delineation of political decisions—traceable in the form of contracts, conventions, and publications—is only one piece of the picture. Although such explicit and overt steps in the emergence of a global policy on heritage inform us about procedural sequences, political milestones, and

policy results, they fail to make tangible the persuasive efforts and situational factors required to make the idea of an intangible heritage policy convincing and sticky enough to develop into its present form. The founding myths of UNESCO's intangible heritage convention—the stories told by central actors about how the idea of intangible heritage made it onto the international stage and how it became forceful enough to be made into policy—are a cornerstone in understanding the process, as they explicate issues of injustice, misappropriation, fear of loss and decay, and cultural hegemony. They transform policy matters into compelling calls for action and—from a methodological standpoint—give insight into how processes of coalition building and negotiation are informed by ideas entailed in narratives (Hafstein). Such founding myths motivate political engagement, garner political support, and, not least, create public support for political projects. Told differently by different actors, alternative accounts to these stories are possible. In most cases, there is not just one version but diverging views and contesting interpretations. Without limiting itself to the “one” version (and, moreover, without relying solely on narrative), narrative analysis thus aids in grasping a wider picture of political processes.

The study of narratives provides insights into practices that are inaccessible to ethnographic approaches for another reason. This is the case for what Bueger calls “clandestine, illicit or violent practices” (Bueger 1811). Using narratives in publicly available interviews with Somali pirates, Bueger analyzes different justifications for piracy in the Gulf of Aden. He identifies the political narrative of piracy as a form of coast guard, used to legitimize the practice and as a recruitment tool. As a “meaningful fiction,” the narrative of Somali pirates as a quasi coast guard “is of high practical utility for different people in different situations” (1824). Under conditions of fragile statehood, the question of whether this narrative is actually believed is of less importance—what matters is that it is used to make sense of the practice, to organize social life, and to structure political order. Although such narratives on clandestine practices are limited in scope and have limited explanatory power, they allow research on fields such as insurgencies or criminalized political movements otherwise inaccessible. They can serve as a starting point to delve deeper into certain aspects, be it the notion of piracy as communities of practice (Bueger), founding stories of international organizations (Hafstein), or other fields.

Contributions in This Special Issue

The “narrativist turn” in the human sciences helped establish a perspective on history, society, and politics that allows for a breadth of methodology and “multidisciplinary dexterity”⁸ (Kreiwirth 64) in approaching different topics. The articles in this special issue on political narratives and narrations of the political in their various forms present accounts and definitions of narrative from different disciplinary backgrounds—linguistic anthropology (Perrino), political sciences (Gadinger, Smith Ochoa, and Yildiz), European ethnology (Sutter), and social anthropology (Sanders)—and deliver overlapping perspectives on narratives. In bringing together such different disciplinary perspectives, theoretical understandings, and methodical approaches to narratives, the issue hopes to open a discussion on the thematic scope of political narratives without constricting itself to theoretical demarcations.

Ove Sutter (“Narratives of ‘Welcome Culture’: The Cultural Politics of Voluntary Aid for Refugees”) analyzes the role of narrative in civic political engagement for refugees. He shows how narratives feature in constructing concepts of voluntary work, in mediating political views on migration, and in shaping the relationships between volunteers and public authorities. Sabina Perrino’s article, “Narrating Migration Politics in Veneto, Northern Italy,” employs a sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropology approach to the topic of migration. Focusing on narrative practices of speakers in Veneto, she illustrates how political narratives feature in the coconstruction of political, social, and cultural identity and how processes of exclusion and racialization are performed in narratives. Rita Sanders (“Unity and Stability? Legacies and Remembrance of the Great Patriotic War in Russia’s Exclave of Kaliningrad”) scrutinizes how official narratives relate to local narratives as part memory politics. She shows how personal family narratives are positioned vis-à-vis official political frames of past events and how different aspects of suffering, helplessness, military prowess, and patriotism are juxtaposed in the process. The contribution by Frank Gadinger, Christopher Smith Ochoa, and Taylan Yildiz on “Resistance or Thuggery? Political Narratives of Urban Riots” make use of narrative analysis as a micro-perspective to show how state narratives and local practices of storytelling make sense of urban riots in Paris and Baltimore.

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■ NOTES

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6. Yet this is not a necessity, nor is it a constriction of narrative forms. For popular culture formats, Mittell argues that there is a shift away from relatively simple "episodic and serial forms" to more "narrative complexity," for example, in TV series, without losing any appeal (Mittell 29).
7. See Bendix 103–28 for an overview of the development of performance theories in folkloristics that deal specifically with such issues.
8. Kreiswirth ascribes these qualities specifically to the work of Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur.

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